

School Counselors' Perceptions of Their
Changing Roles and Responsibilities

by

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A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in
Guidance and Counseling

Approved: 2 Semester Credits


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December, 2006

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Title: *School Counselors' Perceptions of Their Changing Roles and Responsibilities*

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS Guidance and Counseling

Research Adviser: Barbara Flom, Ph.D.

Month/Year: December, 2006

Number of Pages: 45

Style Manual Used: American Psychological Association, 5th edition

ABSTRACT

The role of the school counselor has changed immensely over the last several years. The school counselors' role has evolved from providing vocational guidance to addressing the developmental needs of all students. "A career in school counseling in the 21st century is a world away from what school counselors used to do. As the profession and school counselors themselves continues evolving, the students benefit even more" (Viccora, 2006, p.11). School counselors today are assuming many different responsibilities and roles due to current educational trends. Student-counselor ratios have continued to rise across the country and the national average far exceeds the recommend ratio. As student-counselor ratios continue to rise across the country, it is imperative that we turn to school counselors for their perspectives on the changes in their professional roles.

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Wisconsin K-12 school counselors related to changes in their professional role. Data were collected from

47 Wisconsin school counselors using an online survey instrument during the spring of 2006.

The results indicated that the largest responses to increased activity change came in the areas of testing, meetings, paperwork, counseling for personal/social issues, and class scheduling. The only activity for which a considerable decrease in time spent was group counseling. The factors that respondents rated highest for contributing either some or very much to their changing role as school counselors were school environment, student/counselor ratio, No Child Left Behind, and declining budgets. School counselors predicted that they will experience an increase in caseloads, tracking of student progress toward standards, counseling for personal/social issues, referrals to outside agencies, and will make greater use of technology in the next five years.

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank all of my family for their support and encouragement in helping me to reach my goal of completing my Master's degree. I would especially like to thank my stepdad for believing in me and for the extra help and encouragement along the way.

I wish to thank my research advisor, Dr. Barb Flom for her guidance through this research project.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The role of the school counselor has changed immensely over the last several years. The role of the school counselor has evolved from providing vocational guidance to addressing the developmental needs of all students. “A career in school counseling in the 21st century is a world away from what school counselors used to do. As the profession and school counselors themselves continues evolving, the students benefit even more” (Viccara, 2006, p. 11). Public awareness of increasing social problems such as poverty, violence, suicide, divorce, child abuse, and truancy has also impacted the role of the school counselor. School counselors have been called to assist students by addressing the challenges that can interfere with their learning. As social problems and educational trends arise, school counselors must be able to change their focus and responsibilities to assist students and families in dealing with these issues and concerns. School counselors today are assuming many different responsibilities and roles due to current educational trends. Educational trends such as an increasing student to counselor ratio, the impact of No Child Left Behind, and declining school budgets can be linked to the changing role of the school counselor. Consequently, the pressure on school counselors has increased dramatically.

Student to counselor ratios have continued to rise across the country. The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) recommends a ratio of 250 students for every one counselor to ensure all students receive attention and quality services (ASCA, 2005). The national average far exceeds the recommend ratio. As school counselor caseloads have increased, the amount of personal and social issues that

students are coming to school with certainly has not declined. The stagnant economy over the past several years has resulted in job reductions and losses for many families. Many school aged children are going home after school to homes with a lack of supervision and where there is not enough to eat. The Iraq war has also affected a large percentage of American families. A substantial amount of students have at least one relative away from home at war. Students are impacted greatly when soldiers pass away or are seriously wounded. Many students have their first experience with death or serious injury of a loved one while they are in school.

The No Child Left Behind Act has placed a tremendous focus on student achievement scores. The national testing movement has impacted the role of the school counselor. School counselors prepare for state tests and use the data gathered on student performance.

With declining school budgets, some school counselors are increasing their accountability measures by collecting data to demonstrate the effectiveness of school counseling programs in the lives of students. Accountability measures allow school counselors to show how they are helping students to succeed.

With the development of the ASCA National Model school counselor roles are now more clearly defined. The national model has defined the professional roles for school counselors and has stated appropriate and inappropriate activities for school counselors. The ASCA National Model has also provided school counselors with a representation of how much time school counselors spend delivering services. The combination of increased workloads and responsibilities spread across fewer school

counselors has brought on a whole new level of awareness to the role of the school counselor.

Statement of the Problem

As state and local resources to schools have diminished over the past several years the job descriptions of all public school educators have undergone changes in order to adapt. This has been especially true for school counselors. School counselors and the institutions that train them now see the need to study their changing roles in order to use their time as efficiently as possible to meet the many needs of students.

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of Wisconsin K-12 school counselors related to changes in their professional role. Data were collected through the use of an online survey instrument during the spring of 2006.

Research Objectives

There are three research objectives this study will focus upon. They are;

1. To determine the extent to which school counselors view their roles as having changed over the last few years.
2. To determine school counselors' perceptions of the factors that have contributed to their changing professional role.
3. To determine school counselors' expectations for changes in their professional role over the next five years.

Assumptions and Limitations

This research study assumed that the participants in this research study are practicing Wisconsin school counselors who have sufficient knowledge of both past and present school counseling practices to complete the survey instrument accurately. It is

assumed the online survey designed by the researcher was a sufficient tool for measuring school counselors' perceptions about their professional role. It is also assumed that all participants would complete the survey in an honest and proper manner.

This research study may be limited by the time of the year the online survey will be sent to participants. The survey designed for this research study is only available to participants in an online format. Some participants may view the online survey instrument as easy to access and efficient tool while other participants may view the online format difficult to complete.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

This chapter will discuss the historical role of school counselors, current education trends and the professional roles of school counselors. The chapter will conclude with perspectives on current school counselor roles and future predictions for the school counseling profession.

Historical Role of School Counselors

The role of the school counselor is changing. School counselors today assume many different responsibilities and tasks based on the particular needs of students and school districts. The profession of school counseling is rather new but its history can be traced back to the 1880s (Coy, 1999). Jesse B. Davis introduced the first documented school guidance program in 1889 (Coy, 1999). Davis established the guidance component in each English class in the school where he was a principal. In 1949 a major changed occurred in the guidance movement when R. H. Mathewson illustrated that the “guidance process occurs in an individual in a developmental sequence to the age of maturity” (Coy, 1999 p. 2). This insight directed the area of guidance to become more centered on the developmental needs of individuals.

Due to the limited amount of opportunity to receive professional training in school counseling, the number of school counselors was small until the 1950s. In 1952 the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) was formed, which reinforced the identity of school counseling (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). ASCA provided the profession of school counseling with many new opportunities such as “professional development strategies, research, resources, and advocacy promoting the profession’s

identity” (Lambie & Williamson, 2004, p. 125). ASCA continues to provide the school counseling profession with many opportunities including the development of the new *ASCA National Model* (ASCA, 2005).

Another important figure in the history of school counseling was Frank Parsons. Parsons became known as the “Father of Guidance,” and developed a vocational program that matched individuals’ traits with a vocation (Coy, 1999). The term employed during the early 1900s for school counseling was vocational guidance. Vocational guidance involved “roles that were similar to modern career counseling with a focus on the transition from the school to work, emphasizing an appropriate client-occupational placement match” (Lambie & Williamson, 2004, p. 124). The early counselors were focused on guidance and concentrated on ethical and occupational issues.

The instruction of school guidance counselors became a main concern with the launching of Sputnik in 1957 and the passing of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 (Coy, 1999). The NDEA “poured millions of dollars into schools of education to train a new generation of counselors who would be expected to identify and assist promising American youths to enter the sciences and pursue higher education” (Hayes, Dagley, & Horne, 1996, p. 378). School guidance counselors began to push students with high aptitude in the areas of math and science to take more courses to prepare for college so that they might become future technological innovators.

Current Education Trends

The training of school counselors today has changed and with new trends in education, counselors are taking on many new tasks and roles. School counselors are now educated and experienced in knowledge and skill based programs that stress counseling,

guidance, consultation, coordination, and referrals (Coy, 1999). The role of the school counselor has progressed from providing guidance and career information to addressing the developmental needs of students. Counselors address students' developmental needs in three diverse areas: personal/social development, academic development, and career development (ASCA, 2005). School counselors can help students to learn effectively by addressing these diverse areas and the challenges that may interfere with their learning. Some common concerns that can interfere with the learning process include: violence, suicide, divorce, child abuse, pregnancy, peer pressure, poverty, and decision making skills.

Education is facing a new phase of reform in the United States. Among these changes is the role of the school counselor. "Role ambiguity is present in school counseling to the extent that even professional school counselors have different perceptions of their roles in the school environment" (Lambie & Williamson, 2004, p. 124). Role ambiguity can occur when a person lacks information about their work role and there is a lack of clarity about the expectations and responsibilities of the job.

Three factors appear to identify a need for change in the role of counseling and consultative services in the schools. The first factor is the national reports calling for school reform. The next factor appears to be the increasing recognition for the significance of early intervention for the prevention of school related problems. A rising public awareness of the effects on children with a variety of social problems is also a factor in the need for change in the role of the school counselor (Hayes et al, 1996). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is also a current education policy initiative that greatly impacts the role of the school counselor. Counselor educators have been challenged to

collaborate with their school colleagues in the expansion of new models for preparing counselors who might work in reorganized schools (Association for Counselor Education & Supervision, 1990).

Guidelines, practice, theory, and research are joining together in an emergent agreement on the significance of providing counseling and other support services to students and their parents. The public has also become more aware of the increasing social problems that are affecting children and their families. Unwanted pregnancy, drug addiction, violence, truancy, increasing drop out rates, and decreasing economic resources are all contributing factors related to school problems. School counselors play a major role in providing support and services to students and families dealing with social problems. School counselors assist all students, not just the top or the bottom half or the students in trouble.

Defining the Role of the School Counselor

The role of the professional school counselor is intricate and versatile. Despite the fact that the history of school counseling can be traced back to the 1880s, school counselors have struggled recently with defining their role within the school (Coy, 1999). If school counselors do not clearly define their role, school administrators, teachers, and parents often may view the counselor's role from their own perspectives (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). Paisley and McMahon (2001) note that role definition is one of the most considerable challenges facing school counselors today. School counselors for years have struggled to clearly identify their position and their roles were not uniformly expressed from state to state and school district to school district (Sink, 2002). As social problems and current events arise, school counselors must be able to change their focus and

responsibilities to deal with these concerns. In order for school counselors to not feel as if they are being pulled in many different directions, “counselors can define their role better by recognizing they cannot do their work alone and need to collaborate with other stakeholders” (Sears & Granello, 2002, p. 165). Sink (2002) defines the role of school counselors by stating; “counselors are not, the central fixtures in a school counseling program or the chief advocates for students and their caregivers, rather, they are highly educated, collaborative individuals who can effectively coordinate direct and indirect services required for students to thrive in the school environment and hopefully, the community” (p. 157). The consultative role is an important responsibility for school counselors to be actively involved in.

It is also imperative that school counselors attempt to define their roles more clearly to create and retain professional boundaries when trying to limit the number of non-counseling tasks which they take on. Non-counseling tasks can consist of secretarial responsibilities, filling in for teachers when they are not available, lunch duty, and other responsibilities assigned by administrators and staff looking for extra assistance. Non-counseling tasks can take a considerable amount of time and pull school counselors away from more appropriate counseling activities. Dahir (2004) stated that “when schools fail to clearly define the counselor’s role, school administrators, parents with special interests, teachers, or others may believe that their agendas ought to be the school counseling program’s priority” (p.344).

Current School Counselor Roles and Trends

State models for school counseling programs have existed in Wisconsin and many other states for several years. These programs were supplemented by national standards

in 1997 to illustrate what school counseling students should know and be able to do as a result of participating in a school counseling program (Campbell & Dahir, 1997). The ASCA National Model was developed in 2003 and was “preceded by efforts at delineating the best way to organize and manage professional school counselors’ work” (ASCA, 2005, p. 82). While professional associations such as ASCA have strongly encouraged their members to endorse and utilize their model and the national standards associated with it, school principals have historically exerted a major influence on the role of school counselors regardless of recommendations by professional organizations (Paisley & Borders, 1995). Not surprisingly, ASCA agrees that the success of any school counseling program will be dependent upon the support of the building principal.

The question of what should be emphasized in a school counseling program produces different results at the elementary level and at the secondary level. While elementary school counselors show a “greater support for the personal/social development domain, high school counselors show more interest in the career development domain” (Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, & Jones, 2004, p. 159).

In the 2004 research study by Perusse, Goodnough, Donegan, and Jones revealed no clear agreement from either principals or school counselors about which tasks would be appropriate or inappropriate for school counselors to perform. Looking at the inappropriate tasks performed by counselors, their data shows that the “exact same tasks that were also the most highly endorsed by school principals at the elementary and secondary level were also the most frequently performed inappropriate tasks by school counselors at each level” (Perusse et al, 2004, p. 159). The data illustrates that school principals are very influential in determining the role of school counselors at every level.

Principals continue to believe that clerical tasks such as registration, scheduling of all new students, administrating assorted tests and maintaining student records are all appropriate uses of a school counselors time (Perusse et al, 2004). On the other hand, elementary school counselors and principals showed substantial agreement on the national standards for school counseling programs. This is encouraging news for school counselors, principals, and students alike.

Sears and Granello (2002) suggest that “school counselors and counselor educators have contributed to role confusion” (p.165). Some school counselors have accepted unclear position descriptions that mirror teachers’ responsibilities instead of school counselor responsibilities. The published *ASCA National Standards for School Counseling Programs* and the *ASCA National Model* have assisted tremendously in defining the professional roles for school counselors (ASCA, 2005). The development of *National Standards for School Counseling Programs* has “encouraged the school counseling community to look within itself to clarify its purpose and establish higher expectations for both students and the programs delivered” (Dahir, 2004, p. 352). The development of the national standards also creates a challenge for school counseling professionals to demonstrate accountability and the relationship of the counseling programs to student achievement (Dahir, 2004). The ASCA 2005 national model has clearly defined the roles of the school counselor. Even with the development of the ASCA national model, it is still essential for school counselors to continue to emphasize and explain their roles clearly to others to avoid becoming involved in non-counseling tasks.

School counselors are facing an increasing diverse student population. Gysbers (2001) suggested that school counselors must recognize and comprehend students' cultural, sociological, psychological, economic, and family backgrounds. Paisley and McMahon (2001) stressed the significance of the Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards in the training and education of school counselors. They were also concerned with the fact that many school counselor training programs only offer one course in cross-cultural counseling. Many school counselors as well as future counselors have limited experience with students from diverse cultures and may not understand their needs or problems (Sears & Granello, 2002). It is vital for school counselors to be open and responsive to learning about diverse cultures.

School counselors play a significant role in the success of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). School counselors are striving to help all students reach success in school and to be prepared to lead a rewarding life as a responsible citizen in society (Sclafani, 2005). The NCLB act requires all educators to be accountable for the performance of all students. With these changes, school counselors have been asked to "use data gathered on student performance to develop their school counseling programs and to help teachers customize educational practices to meet students' individual needs" (Sclafani, 2005, p.58). According to Vail (2005) "counselors are encouraged to collect data on the effectiveness of their overall program, rather than documenting random lessons and the number of children they see" (p.26). Due to declining budgets and increased accountability measures, a vital role for school counselors today is to collect data on school counseling programs to prove program effectiveness in the lives of students.

School counselors have a responsibility to serve all students. Gysbers (2001) implies that the main path for school counselors to reach all students is to put into practice the use of comprehensive school guidance counseling programs that include classroom guidance lessons. All students can benefit from school guidance programs, although “today’s emphasis on highstakes testing has resulted in enormous pressure on teachers to spend as much time as possible teaching academic subjects” (Sears & Granello, 2002, p.166). The push for academic testing is creating great difficulty for school guidance counselors to access classrooms to deliver effective guidance lessons. In addition, school counseling programs are understaffed and school counselors are faced with an increasing student to counselor ratio. A ratio of 250 students for every counselor is recommended by ASCA. The national average is 477 students for every one counselor (Vail, 2005). Some states are exceeding the national average. There are simply not enough school counselors in the schools and with increasing budget cuts there is no indication that more counselors will be placed in the schools anytime soon (Walsh, Howard, & Buckley, 1999). Often when school administrators can not connect school counseling programs with improved school achievement, school counselors are often viewed as extras rather than necessities. “Arizona, Michigan, Minnesota, South Carolina, Wisconsin, and a number of other states are seeing counselors thinned each year” (Vail, 2005, p.25). As school counseling positions and programs are cut back, the remaining school counselors are forced to work with larger caseloads. Sears and Granello (2002) suggested that in order for school counselors to impact the lives of a considerable number of students, counselors need to engage in more consultation, advocacy, and collaboration with other school personnel.

It is also essential for school counselors to engage in continuing professional development. Sears & Granello (2002) consider professional development “essential to developing professional identity as well as improving the knowledge and skills of practicing professionals” (p. 167). School counselors have an obligation to be in charge of their own growth and development. Researchers recommend that professional development in the area of improving cross cultural ability is important in helping counselors discover how to transform the challenge of working with diverse populations into an opportunity (Sears & Granello, 2002).

Future Predictions and Recommendations for the School Counseling Profession

School counselors today assume many different roles and responsibilities, and in the future these roles may look very different. According to Fred Bemark (2002) “one vision of the future school counselor includes having a definitive and established role instead of a ‘catch all’ role that tries to fill system gaps rather than contribute to better academic achievement for all students through regulated and systematic school counseling plans and activities” (p.44). This vision would also consist of school counselors serving as a guide for students, teachers, parents, and administrators, rather than someone who is seen as an expert who has all of the answers. In order for this vision to become a reality, school counselors would need more extensive consultation training, a strong emphasis on the collaborative process, and the skills to serve as a guide and facilitators of process rather than content experts (Bemark, 2002).

Bemark (2002) also suggested that in the year 2021, school counselors will partake in “examining the school culture and environment, multiculturalism within schools, social and behavioral problems, career counseling, psychological issues, and

child development as contributing forces to academic performance” (p.46). Bemark (2002) offered some encouraging words for school counselors and future school counselors stating that, “no longer will there be questions about what purpose or utility school counselors have within schools; they will have essential roles in making the schools of 2021 work” (p.47). These visions for the future would greatly reduce the current issue of role ambiguity within the school counseling profession.

With the development of the new ASCA National Model, school counselor roles have been defined, although not all school counselors and administrators are familiar with the national model. Foster, Young, & Hermann (2005) recommended that “school counselors examine their daily work activities to determine if they are engaging in those activities that promote students’ academic, career, and personal/social development on a regular and consistent basis as opposed to noncounseling related activities” (p.320). Sink (2002) recommended that school counselors “periodically take a step back and ask themselves difficult questions. Are we effective? What can we do better? How might we improve?” (p.161). These four questions relate to the ASCA National Model and are essential questions school counselors should ask themselves now and in the future. Sink (2002) also encouraged school counselors to remain focused on “developing and updating the skills needed to serve all students, exploring innovations in educational and counseling theory and practice, advocating for themselves and their programs, collaborating with one another, other school personnel, and with community agencies and programs, measuring student and program accomplishments and needs, creating a sense of community in their schools, and demonstrating a high degree of professionalism (p.

161). These are skills necessary for school counselors to develop to maintain an effective school counseling program.

School counseling is a profession that will continue to undergo many changes in the future. Gysbers' (2001) vision for guidance and counseling in the 21st century was "fully implemented comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in every school district in the United States, serving all students and their parents staffed by active, involved school counselors" (p.103). Sears and Granello (2002) recommended that school counselors establish a professional identity, join counseling organizations, and continue to work with administrators to help them understand the significance of professional development for school counselors.

As the profession of school counseling continues to transform, counselor education programs also must change in order to support the new ideas and responsibilities of school counseling. Professional organizations such as the American School Counseling Association are advocating for consistency in counselor education and licensure standards (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). To promote stability and reduce role ambiguity, school counselors need to advocate for their position within their school and communities (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). There are many steps school counselors can take to define and strengthen their role within the school. Lambie & Williamson (2004) suggested that the support of the school principal in the implementation of a school counseling program is crucial in determining the program's effectiveness. It is essential for school counselors to maintain frequent contact with the school principal and inform the principal of current issues. Researchers recommended that "professional school counselors should work to gain administrative support in an effort to change licensure

requirements in those states continuing to mandate teaching experience” (Lambie & Williamson, 2004, p. 128). The same authors also recommended that school counselors receive continuing clinical supervision to help them improve their counseling skills, learn how to deal with complex student issues, and perform their many functions ethically (Lambie & Williamson, 2004). In addition, to reduce the current issue of role ambiguity, Lambie & Williamson (2004) recommended that school counselors need to become active advocates for their professional role. Lambie & Williamson (2004) suggested that we shift away from school counselors being perceived as guidance counselors to being school counseling professionals with clearly defined roles and tasks is needed and requires a conscious effort by the entire profession. As more school counselors become familiar with the ASCA National Model more students will benefit from a comprehensive, preventive and developmental school counseling program.

The role of the school counselor has changed vastly over the last several years to address the developmental needs of all students. School counselor roles have also changed to address current educational trends and policies. As student to counselor ratios continue to rise across the country, it is imperative that we turn to school counselors for their perspectives on the changes in their professional roles.

Chapter Three

Methodology

This research study is a descriptive study that gathered information from school counselors to determine the perceptions of Wisconsin K-12 guidance counselors related to changes in their professional role. This chapter includes information about how the school counselors came to be participants, a description of the participants, and the instruments that were used during the study. Additionally, this chapter will describe the data collection and data analysis procedures which were used to collect and process the data. The chapter will conclude with the procedural limitations.

Subject Selection and Description

The population for this study was 200 school counselors randomly chosen from a directory of Wisconsin public school counselors provided online by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. All of the selected participants in this study were practicing Wisconsin K-12 school counselors. Forty-seven participants agreed to complete a survey developed by the researcher using an online survey instrument.

Instrumentation

The single instrument used in this study was developed by the researcher. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A. The questions on the survey focused on how school counselors time spent on selected activities had changed over the past year; how much each of these selected activities had contributed to their role change; and how these school counselors thought their role would change over the next five years. The questions on the survey directly focused on the three research questions. They are; to determine the extent to which school counselors view their roles as having changed over the last few

years; to determine school counselors' perceptions of the factors that have contributed to their changing professional role; and to determine school counselors' expectations for changes in their professional role over the next five years.

The survey instrument was designed for school counselors to complete easily and efficiently in ten minutes or less. Item 1 consisted of a three response Lickert scale that listed fourteen school counselor roles. School counselors were asked if their time spent on these activities had increased, decreased, or remained unchanged. Item 2 consisted of a four response Lickert scale that listed eleven factors. School counselors were asked to indicate whether these factors contributed to their role change very much, some, little, or none. Item 3 consisted of a five response Lickert scale that listed eleven scenarios. School counselors were asked to indicate if they would strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree that each of these scenarios was probable during the next five years. The scale also offered the school counselors the opportunity to indicate if they were neutral on each scenario. The instrument was submitted and approved by the IRB board. A copy of the approval letter can be found in Appendix B. The instrument used for this research included a consent message that introduced the researcher, explained the intent of the study, and clarified such issues as confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from participation in the study. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix C.

Data Collection

Permission to start data collection for the purpose of this research study was requested from the University of Wisconsin Stout in April of 2006. Data collection occurred during the spring of 2006. While no incentive was offered to complete the survey, the research study will be available to access on the internet.

Data Analysis

Since all of the data for this study were nominal, responses from each of the questions were analyzed in the form of frequency and percentage of the responses. The mean response for each factor in Item 2 was also computed.

Limitations

Since this instrument was designed by the researcher, there were no previous measures of either reliability or validity. Also, because internet surveys are not routine, it is possible that some of the less technologically savvy school counselors chose not to participate for that reason.

There does not seem to be a “slow season” for school counselors, so a somewhat lower response rate to this survey was anticipated. Obviously, the results of this study cannot be generalized beyond the school counselors who participated in the study. It was assumed that every school counselor who completed the survey instrument did so to the best of their ability.

Chapter Four

Results

This chapter will include the results of this research study. Demographic information and data analysis will be discussed. The chapter will conclude with the research questions under investigation.

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of Wisconsin K-12 school counselors related to changes in their professional role. Data were collected through the use of an online survey instrument created by the researcher. This survey focused on the three specific research questions mentioned earlier in this research. Each question had numerous sub-questions that school counselors were asked to respond to using a Lickert type scale which was modified for each of the questions. The three questions will be addressed in order in this chapter.

Demographic Information

There were 200 Wisconsin K-12 school counselors who were contacted via email to participate in the study. Of those contacted, 47 agreed to participate and complete the survey instrument. No other demographic information was collected from the participants.

Data Analysis

Each survey item was analyzed with respect to the frequency and percentage of responses in each category. Given that an online survey instrument was utilized for this study, there were not any incomplete, damaged or unreadable survey responses.

Table 1

Percentage of School Counselors Reporting Changes in time spent on School Counselor Activities

School Counselor Activities	Increased	Decreased	Unchanged
Individual Counseling	45%	13%	43%
Group Counseling	23%	30%	47%
Classroom Guidance	21%	15%	64%
Presenting Information in School Assemblies	26%	11%	64%
Involvement with Class Scheduling	51%	4%	45%
State and/or National Testing	64%	2%	34%
Paperwork	62%	0%	38%
Counseling for Personal/Social Issues	57%	9%	34%
Attending Meetings	64%	2%	34%
Career and College Choices	32%	0%	68%
Programs such as Conflict Resolution	23%	11%	66%
Classroom Observations	26%	11%	64%
Behavior Intervention Plans	49%	9%	43%
Working with Community Agencies	47%	11%	43%

The largest responses to increased activity change came in the areas of testing (64%), meetings (64%), paperwork (62%), counseling for personal/social issues (57%), and class scheduling (51%). Increased behavior intervention plans, working with community agencies, and individual counseling also saw percentage gains in the mid to

high forties. The only activity for which a substantial decrease in time was reported was group counseling. This was noted by 30% of the respondents. Several school counselors felt the time they spent on some school counseling activities has remained unchanged.

The largest responses to school counseling activities that remained unchanged were classroom guidance (64%), presenting information in school assemblies (64%), working with students concerning career and college choices (68%), involvement with programs such as conflict resolution, peer mediation, and/or violence reduction (66%), and classroom observations (64%).

Table 2

Percentage of School Counselors Identifying Factors Contributing to Role Change

Factors	Very Much	Some	Little	None
School Environment	38%	45%	13%	4%
Student to Counselor Ratio	40%	32%	15%	13%
No Child Left Behind	21%	51%	21%	6%
High Rate of Faculty turn Over (Retirement, Relocation)	4%	26%	32%	38%
High Rate of Administration Turn Over	6%	17%	23%	53%
Declining Budgets	38%	32%	17%	13%
Taking on Non-Counseling Duties	23%	32%	36%	9%
National Testing	19%	34%	32%	15%
Block Scheduling or Schedule Changes	17%	30%	15%	38%
Paperwork Related to Accountability	15%	43%	36%	6%
School Related Evening Obligations	6%	30%	36%	28%

The factors that respondents rated highest for contributing either some or very much to their changing role as school counselors were school environment (83%), student/counselor ratio (72%), No Child Left Behind (72%), and declining budgets (70%). Those activities that school counselors viewed as having little or no effect upon their role change were administrative turn over (76%), faculty turnover (70%), and school related evening obligations (64%). Another way to look at these findings is to weight the responses (very much = 3, some =2, little =1, and none =0). The mean response for each factor was also computed in the table below. The table below illustrates the factors which were most influential listed from high to low.

Table 3

Mean Responses

Factor	Mean Response
School Environment	2.17
Student to Counselor Ratio	2.00
Declining Budgets	1.96
No Child Left Behind	1.87
Taking on Non-Counseling Duties	1.70
Paperwork Related to Accountability	1.66
National Testing	1.57
Block Scheduling or Schedule Changes	1.26
School Related Evening Obligations	1.15
High Rate of Faculty Turn Over	.96
High Rate of Administration Turn Over	.77

Table 4

School Counselors' Predictions for the Next Five Years

Predictions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Counselors will use more prevention	23%	38%	26%	13%	0%
Counselors will use of technology	30%	53%	17%	0%	0%
Counselors will do more group work	13%	36%	43%	6%	2%
Counselors will have larger caseloads	53%	43%	4%	0%	0%
Counselors will provide more counseling for personal/social issues	38%	36%	13%	11%	2%
Counselors will do more classroom based guidance	6%	38%	30%	26%	0%
Counselors will work in smaller school structures	0%	13%	36%	40%	11%
Counselors will make more referrals to outside agencies	23%	47%	28%	2%	0%
Counselors will spend more time tracking student progress towards meeting standards and outcomes	19%	57%	13%	11%	0%
Counselors will do more guidance with students concerning career and college choices	6%	57%	26%	11%	0%
Counselors will be more involved with inservicing teachers on counseling related topics	11%	40%	36%	13%	0%

School counselors predicted that five definite activities would change their roles over the next five years. A full 96% of the school counselors surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that they will experience an increase in caseloads over the next five years. None of the school counselors disagreed with this prediction. Other significant changes predicted were greater use of technology (83%), increased tracking of student progress toward standards (74%), increased counseling for personal/social issues (74%), and increased referrals to outside agencies (70%). Other strong predictions include more guidance with students concerning career and college choices (63%), and increased prevention programs (61%).

Research Objectives

This research study focused upon three research objectives. Research objective number one was to determine the extent to which school counselors view their roles as having changed over the last few years. Item number one on the survey instrument addressed this objective. Each survey item was analyzed with respect to the frequency and percentage of responses in each category. The largest responses to increased activity change came in the areas of testing, meetings, paperwork, counseling for personal/social issues, and class scheduling. The only activity for which a considerable decrease in time spent was group counseling.

Research objective number two was to determine school counselors' perception of the factors that have contributed to their changing professional role. Item number two on the survey instrument addressed this objective. The factors that respondents rated highest for contributing either some or very much to their changing role as school counselors were school environment, student/counselor ratio, No Child Left Behind, and declining

budgets. Those activities that school counselors viewed as having little or no effect upon their role change were administrative turn over, faculty turnover, and school related evening obligations.

Research objective number three was to determine school counselors' expectations for changes in their professional role over the next five years. Item number three on the survey instrument addressed this objective. School counselors predicted that they will experience an increase in caseloads, tracking of student progress toward standards, counseling for personal/ social issues, referrals to outside agencies, and will make greater use of technology. Other strong predications include more guidance with students concerning career and college choices and increased prevention programs.

Additional Comments

Eight school counselors chose to add additional comments in the area that solicited those remarks. Three of these comments made references to the survey instrument itself (see Appendix A). Two school counselors pointed out that counseling varies so much by grade level (elementary, middle, and high school), and /or time of year in the case of high school counselors, that perhaps the data should be analyzed in that manner. Two other counselors wanted to add the fact that family issues are playing an increasing role in their job as counselors. Two of the comments addressed a role change trend away from counselor toward coordinator and data collector. A copy of the additional comments can be found in Appendix D. All these comments will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter Five

Discussion

This chapter will include a discussion of and conclusions formed about the results of this study. This chapter will conclude with the author's recommendations for further research of this topic.

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of Wisconsin public school counselors toward their changing role as well as their predictions on how their role would change over the next five years. It is important for teachers, parents, administrators, and school counselor educators to understand school counselors' perceptions of their role in order to adapt to those changes that are inevitable, as well as attempt to alter those changes which they deem to be undesirable.

The limitations of this study include the fact that internet surveys are not routine, so it is possible that some of the less technologically savvy school counselors chose not to participate for that reason. Also, there does not seem to be a "slow season" for school counselors, so a somewhat lower response rate to this survey was anticipated. Obviously, the results of this study cannot be generalized beyond the school counselors who participated in the study.

In this study, 70 percent of school counselors reported that their roles and responsibilities have changed due to declining school budgets. Seven years ago, Walsh et. al. (1999) advised that decreasing state and local financial support for schools could result in a declining number of school counselors despite the fact that the need for school counselors has never been greater.

The single survey item which school counselors agreed upon most was their prediction that caseloads would continue to increase over the next five years. A full 96% of all school counselors in this study believe that their caseloads will increase over the next five years.

While the ASCA has gone to great lengths to encourage all their members to endorse the association's model and standards for a professional role, Perusse et. al. (2004) point out that oftentimes, school counselors seem powerless against the forces of school administrators, parents with special interests, teachers, or others with aggressive agendas.

The federally mandated No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has placed an ever increasing emphasis on academic testing. While many support the increased pressure put on students, parents and teachers to meet these new academic performance standards, under funding this program has placed incredible pressures on teachers and school counselors to accommodate the new demands of the program with little or no new resources.

Seventy two percent of school counselors surveyed cited NCLB as having either very much or some influence in changing their role over the past year. Perusse et. al. (2004) found that school counselors are moving away from those activities that ASCA emphasizes in their model, and toward precisely those activities that the ASCA model deems to be the least desirable activities to be found within a model school counseling program. School counselors surveyed in this study reported that several factors such as student to counselor ratio, No Child Left Behind, declining school budgets, national testing, and paperwork related to accountability have contributed to their role change.

These factors may lead school counselors to spend more time on activities that the ASCA National Model considers as inappropriate.

School counselors in this study reported having less time for student counseling and predicted larger caseloads were in the near future. Eighty three percent also predicted that school counselors will make greater use of technology.

Some schools have begun to offer online class registration as well as computerized scheduling and schedule changing options. Some schools even offer the opportunity for students and parents to schedule appointments with their school counselor online. It is possible that many of the non-school counselor activities that currently require school counselors to take time away from focusing on student concerns may soon be accomplished through the use of greater technology.

Although it still requires a lot of counselor time, 70 percent of the school counselors in this study predicted that the number of referrals that they make to outside agencies will increase over the next five years. This finding is certainly consistent with the writings of Sink (2002) who believes that school counselors should play an increasingly collaborative role within both the school and the community.

More than half of the school counselors (57 percent) reported that they had experienced an increase in counseling for personal/social issues. Another 74 percent predicted that counseling for personal/social issues would increase during the next five years. In fact, of the fourteen activities listed under question one of the online survey, school counselors reported only one activity “group counseling” that they are doing less of since last year. This may be a result of larger caseloads and increasing demands and responsibilities.

School counselors also identified seven of the eleven factors listed in survey question two as contributing either some or very much to their changing role. Substantial role differences between high school and elementary school counselors no doubt accounted for two of the non-selected factors “block scheduling” and “school related evening obligations.” The remaining two non-selected factors, “faculty turn over” and “administrator turn over,” simply appear to have had no effect on the surveyed school counselors’ roles. When arithmetical means were computed for these same factors with regards to the average response for the contribution of each factor, the results remained the same. These computations were shown in Table 3 in the previous chapter.

On ten of the eleven scenarios where counselors were asked to make predictions for the next five years, school counselors who agreed that these scenarios were probable outnumbered the school counselors who disagreed. School counselors who disagreed were in the majority on the scenario which predicted that “counselors will work in smaller school structures.”

Recommendations

There is limited research available regarding the perceptions of school counselors related to changes in their professional roles. Consequently, further research needs to be conducted in order to gain further insight and understanding of school counselors’ perceptions of their professional roles. Further research in this area of study will be beneficial for current school counselors, future school counselors and school counselor educators. Current school counselors can gain further insight on how other school guidance counselors are responding to changes within the profession. Future school counselors will get a notion of the changing professional roles in school counseling.

School counselor educators will gain additional information from current school counselors about their changing professional roles and will be able to adjust their instruction for graduate school programs and training as needed.

A recommendation for further research would be to replicate this study using three separate survey instruments. A separate survey instrument could be developed for elementary, middle, and high school counselors. This would provide a more comprehensive assessment of school counselor's roles at each grade level. Another recommendation would be to replicate this study using survey instrument mailed to prospective participants. This would encourage participants who prefer to partake using a survey mailed to them versus an online survey. The time of year that the survey is distributed to participants should also be considered. A greater response rate may be dependent on the time of the year the survey is distributed to participants.

This study illustrated that roles and responsibilities for school counselors have increased and are liable to continue to do so in the years to come. As school budgets and local resources continue to diminish, schools will be asked to do more with less in the future. This study is beneficial for current school counselors, future school counselors and school counselor educators. A recommendation for current school counselors is for counselors to compare the results of this research to their roles and responsibilities. School counselors can see how other school counselors are responding to changes within the profession. It is also recommended that school counselors compare their roles and responsibilities to the ASCA National Model. Future school counselors should utilize this research to gain a notion of school counselors' perceptions about their professional roles. School counselor educators can gain valuable information from this research directly

from school counselors about their changing professional roles and will be able to adjust their instruction for graduate school programs and training as needed.

School counselors today are assuming many different responsibilities to address current educational trends. The role of the school counselor has changed greatly over the last several years to address the needs of all students. As school budgets continue to decline and student to counselor ratios continue to rise across the country, it is imperative that we continue to ask school counselors for their perspectives on the changes in their professional roles.

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

1. How has the time you spent on the following activities changed since last year at this time?
Please select one response for each activity.

	Increased	Decreased	Unchanged
Individual Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Group Counseling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classroom Guidance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Presenting Information in School Assemblies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Involvement with Class Scheduling	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
State and/or National Testing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Paperwork	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counseling for Personal/Social Issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attending Meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with Students Concerning Career and College Choices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Involvement with Programs such as Conflict Resolution, Peer Mediation, and/or Violence Reduction	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classroom Observations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Behavior Intervention Plans	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with Community Agencies to Provide Services/Resources Through the School	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. How do these factors contribute to school counseling role change as noted in question one?
Please select one response for the following factors.

	Very Much	Some	Little	None
School Environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student to Counselor Ratio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No Child Left Behind	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High Rate of Faculty turn over (Retirement, Relocation)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High Rate of Administration Turn Over	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Declining Budgets	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Taking on Non-Counseling Duties	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
National Testing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Block Scheduling or Schedule Changes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Paperwork Related to Accountability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School Related Evening Obligations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. What do you think school counselors will be doing in the next five years? Please select one response.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Counselors will use more prevention programs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will make greater use of technology	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will do more group work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will experience an increase in caseloads	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will provide more counseling for personal/social issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will do more classroom based guidance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will work in smaller school structures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will make more referrals to outside agencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will spend more time tracking student progress towards meeting standards and outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will do more guidance with students concerning career and college choices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Counselors will be more involved with inservicing teachers on counseling related topics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Please feel free to add any comments you may have.

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter



Stout Solutions • Research Services
152 Voc Rehab Building

University of Wisconsin-Stout
P.O. Box 790
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790

715/232-1126
715/232-1749 (fax)
<http://www.uwstout.edu/rps/>

Date: April 19, 2006

To: Kayla McLean

Cc: Barb Flom

From: Sue Foxwell, Research Administrator and Human
Protections Administrator, UW-Stout Institutional
Review Board for the Protection of Human
Subjects in Research (IRB)

Subject: Protection of Human Subjects

Your project, "*School Guidance Counselors Perceptions of Changing Roles and Responsibilities*," has been approved by the IRB through the expedited review process. The measures you have taken to protect human subjects are adequate to protect everyone involved, including subjects and researchers.

Please copy and paste the following message to the top of your survey form before dissemination:

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

This project is approved through April 18, 2007. Modifications to this approved protocol need to be approved by the IRB. Research not completed by this date must be submitted again outlining changes, expansions, etc. Federal guidelines require annual review and approval by the IRB.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and best wishes with your project.

***NOTE: This is the only notice you will receive – no paper copy will be sent.**

Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent to Participate in UW-Stout Approved Research

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46.

Title: School Guidance Counselors Perceptions of Changing Roles and Responsibilities

Investigator:

Kayla McLean
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Research Sponsor:

Dr. Barb Flom
Thesis Advisor
403 McCalmont Hall
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Description:

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of Wisconsin K-12 school guidance counselors related to changes in their professional role. You will be asked to provide information related to the changing nature of your professional role as school guidance counselors. You will provide information through the use of an online survey instrument.

Risks and Benefits:

Any potential risks for this study are exceptionally small. A foreseeable risk is that you may possibly feel uncomfortable or intimidated while completing the survey pertaining to your professional roles and responsibilities within the school setting. Your responses will be completely confidential. The information gathered from the survey will not contain your name or any other identifying information. You have the right to refuse to participate and have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study without any adverse consequences. This study will be beneficial for current school counselors, future school counselors and school counselor educators.

Time Commitment and Payment:

The survey will take approximately ten minutes to complete. While no incentive will be offered to complete the survey, the results of the study will be accessible to you online in the UW-Stout thesis collection.

Confidentiality:

The information gathered in this study will not include your name or any other identifying information on any of the documents. The information collected will be kept strictly confidential and any reports of the findings of this research will not contain names or any other identifying information. The general findings of this study will be posted on the UW-Stout library website for you to view.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. You also have the right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study with respect and without any coercion or prejudice.

IRB Approval:

This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

Investigator: Kayla McLean
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Statement of Consent:

By completing the online survey you agree to participate in the project entitled, School Guidance Counselors Perceptions of Changing Roles and Responsibilities.

Appendix D: Additional Comments

1. Number 1 and 2 were difficult because there hasn't been change from last year.
However, over the past five years, my duties have taken on more coordination and oversight than actual counseling. I'm not 100% sure this is inappropriate as long as that coordination and oversight directly impacts the lives of kids.
2. Good survey.
3. It was difficult to answer the questions in terms of counseling as a whole. The roles of counselors are very different at the elementary, middle, and high school level.
4. Family change issues with students continue to increase. Changes affect students in many ways. As a counselor, parents are requesting more interventions related to change. As school counselors, we are asked to respond to family issues.
5. School counselors who work as a team with their building staff will be more effective in helping students meet standards and outcomes. I believe that school counselors are having to deal with more children affected by family issues, angry or hostile parents, or personal health problems. I also believe that there are very serious behavioral problems that school counselors and all staff are being asked to work with, without adequate personnel, financial resources, community programs, and training.
6. As a high school counselor the wording in question one dictates my answers. If you asked how my time has changed in the following areas compared to last year I would answer differently. High school counseling is driven by the time of year.

7. My role of guidance counselor has changed more towards doing data assessment for the district and English as a second language testing. I also do 504's and help with behavioral intervention plans. I am almost always doing more paperwork than helping kids have less time to be doing group and classroom things.
8. The above are the responses of an elementary counselor, but also from one who is working within their district to implement a Comprehensive School Counseling program. I believe the shift that will take place from position to program is one that needs to be addressed, and in the process, the clarification of the role of the counselor, away from administrative and non-counseling duties, to focus on the needs/issues of the students.
9. I believe that we will continue to see a rise in the social emotional needs of our students as the family continues to deteriorate.
10. It would have been nice to break this survey into elementary, middle, and high school. Over the years we have seen a strong increase in our time with 1. College applications: with the state universities raising their entrance requirements we have had more rejections to deal with which brings about longer periods of time to help seniors get into a school and also do more recommendations. 2. We have approximately 25% of our seniors participate in youth options. We hold parent information 2 times per year and assist with helping students come up with potential college schedules to mark on their applications. Handling billing and book purchases is also part of the job. Youth options have clearly added about 100 or more hours to my job!!! 3. Our high school has gone to a block schedule. There are no study halls and seeing students can be difficult. 4. The entire

scheduling process has been assigned to the guidance department. 5. This year alone I have sat in close to 100 IEP's and still have more to go. I don't get much time to track student progress toward standards but we spend a lot of time tracking student credits.

11. As an elementary counselor, I find myself using a lot of prevention programs and spending a lot of time facilitating classroom guidance lessons (one lesson per week in each classroom). However, as time goes on and with budget cuts, I see these types of activities being set aside to deal with "crisis" situations, which is unfortunate. A benefit of prevention programs and classroom guidance lessons is the number of students that are serviced through these activities. Instead of a small number of students being serviced in small group or individual sessions, a large number can be seen and given the same information. With budget cuts coming, I see counselors being stretched with large case loads, and possibly having to travel between schools. This will leave less time for prevention programs and guidance lessons.
12. Counseling is headed for a standards based environment similar to what has taken place in all the academic areas.
13. Thanks, and good luck!